

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 0155

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LI

SUBJECT: GABRIEL MATTHEWS AND THE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE OF LIBERIA

REF: 77 MONROVIA 8627

1. THE GOL MINISTRY OF INFORMATION ISSUED A PRESS RELEASE JANUARY 5 DESCRIBING THE CURRENT VISIT OF A PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE OF LIBERIA (PAL) DELEGATION TO LIBERIA AND QUOTING PRESIDENT TOLBERT AS TELLING THE DELEGATION THAT "HE AND HIS PARTY WILL WELCOME THE EXISTENCE OF ANOTHER POLITICAL PARTY AS LONG AS IT MET THE NECESSARY LEGAL REQUIREMENTS." PAL ISSUED A STATEMENT THE SAME DATE STATING INTER ALIA "THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE AND HIS PARTY WELCOME THE EXISTENCE OF ANOTHER PARTY THROUGH AN OPERATION OF LAW, BY POLICY, AND IN PRINCIPLE. THE DISCUSSIONS COVERED THE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIBERIA AS WELL AS THE SPECIAL INTERESTS AND CONCERN OF THE TRUE WHIG PARTY AND THE PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE OF LIBERIA... PAL BELIEVES THAT THE MANY OBSERVATIONS MADE AND THE CONCLUSIONS REACHED ARE SUFFICIENT TO CONSTITUTE A GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT." (FULL TEXTS BEING SENT SEPARATELY BY CABLE.)

2. GABRIEL MATTHEWS TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANUARY 6 THAT THE "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT" CONFIDENTIAL

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WAS REACHED IN THE PRIVATE DISCUSSION BETWEEN HIM AND PRESIDENT TOLBERT ON DECEMBER 14 (WITH ONLY REGINALD TOWNSEND, MINISTER OF STATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL AFFAIRS ATTENDING) (REFTEL) AND REFERS TO TOLBERT'S AGREEMENT IN THAT MEETING TO PERMIT REGISTRATION OF PAL AS A POLITICAL PARTY AND TO PERMIT IT FREEDOM TO ORGANIZE. PRESSED TO PROVIDE SPECIFICS CONCERNING THE EXACT NATURE OF THIS

COMMITMENT, MATTHEWS WAS VAGUE. HE FEELS THAT THE COMMITMENT IS DEFINITE ENOUGH TO WARRANT HIS RETURN THIS WEEK TO NEW YORK WHERE HE WILL CONSULT WITH PAL MEMBERS TO DECIDE PAL'S NEXT MOVE. HE ANTICIPATES THAT HE WILL RECEIVE APPROVAL OF PAL TO RETURN TO LIBERIA WITHIN A MONTH TO BEGIN ORGANIZATIONAL WORK. HE STATED THAT SAMUEL P. JACKSON, MINISTER OF FINANCE OF PAL, HAS RETURNED ALREADY TO NEW YORK AND THAT OSCAR QUIAH, PAL SECRETARY GENERAL, HAS RETURNED TO NIMBA TO HIS JOB THERE WITH LAMCO.

3. MATTHEWS EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER PROBABLY OPPOSITION FROM CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF THE TRUE WHIG PARTY TO LEGALIZATION OF PAL'S PARTY STATUS. HE HAD HEARD THAT SOME TWP MEMBERS ARE DECLARING THAT IF TOLBERT GIVES LEGAL STATUS TO PAL THIS WILL BE TANTAMOUNT TO SELLING OUT TWP INTERESTS IN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SCHEDULED FOR 1983.

4. MATTHEWS STATED THAT PAL INTENDS TO SEEK REGISTRATION FOR THE PARTY IN MONTSERRADO COUNTY WHERE HE CLAIMS A PAL MEMBERSHIP OF OVER 600. EVEN IF HALF OF THESE DECLINE TO SIGN AS PARTY MEMBERS, FOR FEAR OF GOVERNMENT RETALIATION, HE SAID THAT HE WOULD STILL HAVE THE MINIMUM OF 300 SIGNATURES REQUIRED BY LIBERIAN LAW. HE NOTED THAT IF THE GOVERNMENT CHOOSES IT COULD EASILY BLOCK PARTY REGISTRATION ON TECHNICAL GROUNDS. MOST LIBERIANS
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DO NOT HAVE BIRTH CERTIFICATES AND THUS WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO PROVE EITHER THAT THEY ARE 18 OR THAT THEY ARE IN FACT LIBERIAN. UNLESS THE COUNTY REGISTRAR IS WILLING TO ACCEPT AFFIDAVITS CONCERNING BIRTH, IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO BLOCK REGISTRATION OF THE PARTY BY DENYING THAT THOSE ON THE PAL LIST ARE IN FACT ELIGIBLE CITIZENS.

5. MATTHEWS WAS GIVEN A REGULAR LIBERIAN PASSPORT DATED JANUARY 6 AND WAS ISSUED A B-1, B-2 VISA BASED ON HIS STATED INTENTION TO RETURN TO LIBERIA IN ABOUT ONE MONTH.
CARTER

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